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ABSTRACT

Four first-year secondary school commercial French textbooks were analyzed for the number and type of pictorial references to diversity in race, class, and gender, with particular attention given to how French-speaking countries other than France are portrayed. It is concluded that while some of the books represented a pluralistic society better than others, none totally legitimized difference or promoted personal identification with diversity. Each accepted the fact that some African and Asian countries use French as an official language, but none included an Asian, African, or Arab name in the list of French first names. Content and exercises promoting materialism and consumerism were found in all four books, appealing to U.S. students and perpetuating this approach. Information about political structures and governments was excluded, and no mention was made of poverty, immigration, violence in French schools and suburbs, privatization, regionalism, unemployment, strikes, soup kitchens, racial bias. Even texts addressing multiculturalism did not address issues of separatism, colonialism, dictatorship, immigration patterns, political activism, or the European Union. It is suggested that the teacher's role is to bring contradictions, omissions, and stereotyping to students' attention. Contains 19 references. (MSE)

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Running Head: THE ROLE FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The Role Foreign Language Texts Play In Limiting
Communication And Understanding

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by

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The Role Foreign Language Texts Play In Limiting Communication And Understanding

Foreign language classrooms should be the natural environment for multicultural education. Daily dealings with discourse at its earliest stages allow students to discover and deconstruct meaning almost from the beginning of their exposure to a new language (Derrida, 1976). At the same time, focusing on culture, a melange of high tradition and everyday behavioral patterns should provide an exploration route to the ever- changing fields of dominance that determine who has power and who does not (Bourdieu, trans. 1990). The national Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996) proclaims goals of communication, culture, connections, comparisons and communities and speaks to a vision of preparing students for responsible citizenship in the worldwide neighborhood. With these tenets, a multicultural framework that goes beyond assimilation to finding relevance, encouraging students to take control of their lives, challenging the status quo and learning to work collectively to effect change, is well within reach (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Yet, with a plethora of theoretical support to suggest an outcome of pluralism, impediments, not the least of which is the politics of the foreign language textbook, continue to block the way.

Foreign language education has never been considered a basic component of the curriculum in American schools. It has long represented to some the dangers associated with exposing young minds to different ways of thinking, governing and living. Foreign language study is fragmented and isolated from other disciplines. It is prone to gender bias toward girls in its appraisal as a feminine subject and against them in its canonical and patriarchal treatment of

culture. It has been considered elitist in its upper-middle class Eurocentric approach.

Teachers, who attempt to combat these discriminatory practices by guiding their students to critical consciousness, however, face a daily barrier to this goal in their dependence upon textbooks written to represent the official knowledge of certain groups (Apple, 1993; Castell, Luke & Luke, 1989; Tedick, Walker, Lange, Paige & Jorstad in Guntermann, 1995). In addition the “mushrooming” of the text has limited teachers’ efforts by necessitating the manipulation of numerous types of ancillary materials. Texts designed in a “kaleidoscope approach” compound this distraction by visually fragmenting textual and pictorial information.

By analyzing four first year secondary French textbooks from a critical perspective we will see how teachers and students are limited to achieve at best what Sleeter and Grant call a *Human Relations* approach to multicultural education (1994) and at worst blatant reproduction of the status quo. The texts were examined for the number and type of pictorial and textual references to diversity in race, class and gender. Particular attention was given to how French speaking countries other than France were portrayed. First year texts were chosen because: 1) the high rate of attrition from first to second year foreign language study means students are reached by first year texts. 2) First impressions are more likely to be firmly embedded in the value system of students who continue language study. It is also important to note that each textbook is part of a large package of materials and while only the contents of the text itself, being the primary source of information, will be discussed in detail, the effect of the explosion of ancillary materials will be addressed. By drawing upon

Michael Apple, Pierre Bourdieu, Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant , I will seek to determine whose interests these textbooks serve, whose knowledge is represented, who is being left out and how the communication “across borders” is limited.

The Role of the Textbook

In the foreign language classroom, next to the teacher, the textbook is the greatest source of knowledge. In fact because many teachers are not able to afford a lived experience in a francophone country, the text sometimes acts as a cultural resource for the teacher. The textbook has traditionally been perceived as a tool of learning, a lens through which students can see their way to knowledge. Teachers and students use the foreign language text as a map to see where they are going and pace their movement through logical sequencing. Texts provide the information necessary to visualize abstractions and claim to be open-ended enough to allow individuals to envision beyond what is presented. Texts are replete with pictures, drawings, graphs, all representations of one particular view. A good text can open students’ eyes to new ways of looking at things, while other texts can blind students from knowing or limit their peripheral vision.

What is certain is that no text is neutral. Texts represent someone’s knowledge, official knowledge, and because of what we know of the political and economic dynamics of the competitive market of textbook publishing and state textbook adoption policies (Apple, 1993; Marshall, in Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991), we can be sure that that knowledge reproduces the views of the hegemonic powers. Value judgments made by groups who wish to safeguard the undermining of authority, or discourage “deviant” lifestyles often shape the

look of textbooks. Ethnic and nationalistic stereotyping is one result; emphasis on American patriotism and free enterprise is another. The power of the textbook, then becomes one of moral advocacy, often based on an ill-founded ethic of self-preservation of the groups whose knowledge they represent.

Foreign language textbooks in particular present an interesting ground for examining what form this official knowledge takes. They are, in fact a battleground for cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Anything that is foreign is by nature in contrast to that which is native, in this case, American. Contrast implies comparison. If indeed the ideology represents the dominant class, then when comparison results in seeing the foreign element in a better light than the native element, we can either expect to see it presented from a negative point of view or to see its exclusion from the text. Also, if the portrayal of a certain facet of culture leads students to question the American belief system or consumer-oriented economic system, then we might expect to see that facet of culture eliminated from treatment within the text. We might also expect to find the text structured so as to deskill the teacher and exploit the students.

The mushrooming of the textbook

Foreign language teachers depend on the textbook as a primary source of content and a directional guide in teaching what is traditionally considered a linear subject. Over the past ten years textbook publishers have increased ancillary materials to supplement the areas of the text that teachers found deficient. Workbooks were added to increase grammatical exercises and guided compositions. Student tapes were developed to add listening activities to the workbooks, now called activity books. Publishers created more teacher tapes to add more listening exercises inclusive of more regional accents for in-classroom

use. Teachers have oral and written quiz and test books with accompanying test tapes. Supplementary reading material packets are available, along with overhead visuals, video tapes with scripts and activity masters, computer programs with CD roms and assessment guides for portfolios. All of these ancillary materials are referenced by symbols in the text wherever their use is suggested.

Teachers cannot help but be overwhelmed by all of this. Their work is intensified to the point that they are becoming deskilled. The burden of an encumbering text program takes more time to organize and implement, restricts the teacher to a suggested pace and structure, and limits any autonomy to teach what might have been omitted. If any time goes unfilled the introductory material of the extended teacher's edition of many textbooks suggests organizing student pen pal exchanges, preparing students for national foreign language competitions and joining professional organizations. Indeed there are some very helpful tips included, but few teachers have the time and energy to make use of them in light of their demanding in-class routines. Teachers used to feel guilty about not finishing the text. Teachers now also worry about slighting their students by not giving them the benefit of exposure to all the supplementary materials and extended use of the language.

Teachers are not the only ones who suffer from this intensification. Students must add to their duties listening to cassette tapes and practicing on computers. Students whose economic level prohibits personal possession of these technological aids, must schedule time to use school or library resources, if available. Students are also expected to learn more. In an attempt to legitimize the francophone world many regional accents are represented on tape and their

cultures included in content material. Also, some teachers are interested in teaching daily customs and habits. This can result in a decline in their students' knowledge of traditionally taught high culture and some publishers have responded by including both elements, thus increasing the amount of material to be learned.

Kaleidoscope Texts

One way in which publishers have dealt with the demand to include more facets of the language and culture is to visually fragment the material into what I call a "kaleidoscope approach." Using an example from D. C. Heath's Discovering French we can see this busy layout carried to the extreme. On pages 204 and 205 numbered red circles and blocks designate three exercises. Three-tone gold blocks indicate new vocabulary. A new grammar section is blocked off by green copy and lines. There is a photograph of students in a school yard, a cartoon of neighborhood activities, a blue ticket for the Opéra and a blue and black ad for SNCF (Société Nationale de Chemin de Fer.) Students, while expected to concentrate on one item, must surely be darting from one item to another, finding it extremely difficult to sustain prolonged attention on one piece of information. Students with reading or attentional disabilities struggle tremendously with kaleidoscope texts. Many resist by giving up, saying the work is too difficult. Teachers blame students for not concentrating, and students sometimes blame themselves for not trying hard enough.

Teachers, too, are distracted by the heavily glossed pages in extended teacher texts. Additional culture and realia notes, supplementary vocabulary and grammar explanations, along with the codes for video and cassette tape use fill the sides and bottoms of the page. This not only adds to a sense of confusion but

keeps teachers too busy and too distracted to teach creatively and critically. As with mushrooming texts, the Kaleidoscope texts overload our senses and distract us from knowing, from reflecting and from asking what is missing and why.

Of the four first-year French textbooks analyzed for this paper all have their own peculiarities in dealing with language and culture and all share some similarities. One may be more multicultural, another more communicative, yet all represent the official knowledge of those in power. Textbook publishers rely heavily on what will sell in the large markets of Texas, California and Florida (Apple, 1993). The publishers of the four textbooks I examined are all on those states' adoption lists. As we look specifically at each text it will be important to note what has changed and what has stayed the same between 1990 when *Dis-Moi* was published and 1996, the publication date of *Allez Viens!*. In what ways are students and teachers being empowered, deskilled, alienated, exploited? Whose views are being legitimized; who is being left out and why?

Dis-Moi! (Tell me) whose interests are being served?

Scott Foresman's 505-page *Dis-Moi!* (1990) represents the 1980's quest for foreign language texts to become more informal and to increase their appeal to high school students. The general appeal is to middle class white students who can afford to travel as tourists. A happy young girl is pictured on the front cover reaching into her purse with the probable intent of finding a post card to mail in the French mailboxes behind her. Tourism is featured with sections devoted to Paris and the Chateaux of the Loire, canonical culture. Fashion advertisements abound, along with pictures of retail stores and a one-page drawing of items of clothing for sale in an American cowboy western store. The impression that "what is American in France is good" is not hard to miss. One photograph

pictures three French boys in a park with the center teen wearing a stars and stripes tee-shirt. There is a one-page picture of the French version of Wheel of Fortune, a photo of Star Trek stars on the front of a French television guide and three Snoopy cartoons in French. A Paris Chicago Pizza Pie restaurant ad is also used and *le hamburger* and *le hot-dog* are among the first food- related vocabulary words presented. This is all evidence of the success of what the French would term "American cultural imperialism."

While there is discussion on one culture page early in the book about *la francophonie*, a false consciousness is created concerning the francophone world. African countries are not mentioned in the book. There are photographs of African markets, African women waiting in the airport, Tahitian women, and groups of Senegalese and Moroccans but there is never any text which relates to or explains these pictures. Canada is given a page of culture but no mention is made of separatism. Further in the book there are stereotypical pictures of hockey teams and ski slopes. Diversity was represented pictorially as follows: out of 586 photographs, 23 are of blacks, 15 of North Africans, 6 of Asians, 1 of a Polynesian and 4 of handicapped people. Out of 979 cartoon drawings, 101 are of blacks, 20 of North Africans, 0 Asians and 1 handicapped person. When nationalities are taught reference is made exclusively to western European, Canada and the United States. The slighting or elimination of francophone nations other than France sends a message to students that these peoples are unimportant. If we deal with only France and make it look as much like America as possible, then students will have nothing to compare or judge and the American way of life will remain unchallenged.

This elimination of controversy is evident in other areas. Vocabulary for

housing gives the words for “house”, “building” and “apartment” but shows only home dwellers. French families are portrayed as whole and while the cultural reading refers to divorce being more common today, the overwhelming focus is on *l'esprit de famille*. A glossed-over explanation is given of the French education system. Only academic subjects are included in vocabulary, implying that (1) all French students are academically oriented and those who might fail the baccalaureate exam were lazy, and (2) American students who are using the text in a French class are on academic tracks. The implication that “poor is dumb” rings loud and clear. Foreign languages, French in particular, have long been considered elitist and textbooks, like this one, are geared toward college-bound students who can afford to travel. But these students, especially, are not allowed to think and question.

Discovering French by resisting the “kaleidoscope”

After three very successful editions of the French for Mastery series, D.C. Heath published the 397-page Discovering French in 1993. This text attempts to blend high and low culture and appeal to a sophisticated, materialist teen population. As with Dis-Moi a teenage girl is pictured on the cover, reinforcing the false concept that French is for girls, not boys. The background is a street map of Paris letting us know once again that French is France. Two smaller photos, representing the surface treatment of francophone diversity, picture an Asian boy, a white boy and a black girl and boy. The francophone world is represented within the text by many short cultural notes, pictures, foods and references, but the overall picture is not a multicultural one. Pictorial references include: 779 photographs, 50 of which are of blacks and 980 cartoon drawings, 65 of which are of blacks. Maps are limited to the francophone world in general, France and

Paris. No African nationalities are presented even in the supplementary list of vocabulary. Practitioners of the Jewish and Islamic religions are included with Catholics when percentages of each religion are given. However, Protestants are not mentioned. Other areas left unmentioned are government, health care or the social security system, professions, non-academic school subjects and non-traditional families.

The dominant themes in this textbook include equating up-scale Paris with America, and consumerism. Parisian teens are shown working at a music store; a Jean-Jacques Goldman C.D. is pictured, and French film stars are mentioned, as well as many American television shows and films. Two upper-class Parisian lycées are featured. Shopping is highlighted with pictures of the Galeries Lafayette, Dior and Celine boutiques, discount shopping, flea markets and catalogue ads for clothing. Several exercises focus on buying and the use of French currency and the Carte Bleu credit card. This is not the Paris of HLM's (government housing), immigrant teen violence, high unemployment and transportation strikes.

It is easy to see the appeal of this text to American teens, especially to girls, who are given at least some athletic legitimacy by the mention of the women's Tour de France. Its colorful design, numerous small color photos of interacting teens and youthful cartoon drawings draw one in. But once inside of this kaleidoscope stimuli how do students know where to go? How can they notice who or what is left out when so much fragmentation clouds the view?

Bienvenue (Welcome) to the status quo.

Representing a return to a more conservative view Glencoe's 440- page 1994 textbook *Bienvenue* offers a non-francophone generic image of French from

France, canonic culture, less youth appeal, big doses of sports, fitness and health, travel and money. This book is not kaleidoscopic, but clearly and simply designed as is its message. With Notre Dame and *bateau mouche* tourists on the cover and a rendering of the French flag approximately every four pages, the theme of reproduction of the authority of the status quo and capitalistic society is in evidence. Professions are few (teacher, doctor, fireman, salesperson, shop owner, porter, airline steward(ess) and police). They are reminiscent of the vocabulary taught in the 1950's and 1960's with clear traditional values and work ethics. Reinforcing the idea of an official authority, policemen are pictured three times (not more than once if at all in other texts). Diversity of gender is an issue as *policemen* are pictured in heavy city traffic and on the highway and the *policewoman* are in the safer condition of giving a parking ticket. In a six-page section entitled *Lettres et Sciences* several important historical figures are featured, no women among them. As Sleeter and Grant (1994) point out, textbooks never directly state that wealthy white men hold the world's power ; the books merely present more members of this group than any other.

The information provided on family life is authentic, mentioning the increase in two-parent working families, divorces and single-parent families but because it is presented on a full-page culture section written entirely in French this information is not likely to be completely understood by the students. Only whole families are used as examples with emphasis on one family, the Debussy's (an upper-class name, relating to the composer), living in an apartment in Paris' exclusive 7th arrondissement. School subjects are only academic ones and Paris' elite Henri IV lycée is featured. Particularly interesting is the way in which housing is presented. Many people in Paris are reported as living in apartments

and the poor in HLM suburbs outside of the city. For the rich there are chateaux in the country and for those of more modest means small suburban homes. The information covers everyone authentically but separates each kind of housing into economic class opportunities.

There is no legitimacy of the francophone world. Pictorial references include: 619 photographs, including only 28 of blacks, 3 of North Africans, 4 Polynesians, 0 Asians, 0 handicapped people; and 786 cartoons, with only 54 of blacks, 6 of North Africans, 0 of Asians or Polynesians and 4 of handicapped people. Maps include those of France and Paris in the front of the book, one of the world in the back and there are two stereotypical pictures of Canada (separatism unaddressed) and one of a city in Morocco. Countries, but not nationalities are included in the vocabulary, allowing for little personal identification. It is revealing, too, that the only states mentioned in the geography section are Texas, California and Florida, the targeted markets of textbook publishers.

Consumerism is legitimized through several pictures of purchase-making (in a pharmacy, music and clothes stores, etc.), currency (French and American), someone using an automatic teller and an entire chapter on banking, tourist banking included. Two pictures feature working teens, one in a Montreal music shop, another receiving a paycheck in a fast food restaurant. A chapter on cars and three on tourism devoted to plane travel, train travel and hotels reflect the materialistic aspect of the American dream. The dream myth of American superiority and competitive spirit are evidenced in pictures of Greg Lemond winning the French Tour de France and Magic Johnson playing against a French basketball team. (This book would have been designed before Magic Johnson's announcement on AIDS and, in fact, in a health section the book specifies AIDS

as today's deadliest disease.)

Each chapter is organized in the same way, with structured grammatical presentations, routinized exercises and bounded communicative activities. The stylized drawings, high in artistic quality, are more generic and less like cartoon drawings, more convention textbook types and less appealing to teens. Similar to illustrations in traditional elementary Dick and Jane readers, the drawings, along with the structured grammar, canonical culture, legitimized work ethic and class structure, gender bias, omission of reference to pop culture (television, radio, film, and all but jazz and classical music), all signal a dangerous directive to reproduction of the status quo. It is also important to note that there is no slippery masking of message here. The intent is blatant.

Allez, Viens! (Come on) Consumer

The most recent textbook to come on the market is Allez Viens! published by Holt, Reinhart and Winston in 1996. This 334-page text, with considerably fewer pages than most, reflects an appeal to American teens through its informal, consumer-oriented approach. It is guided by a much-called for multicultural theme emphasizing linguistic and cultural francophone French. While youthful student appeal and multiculturalism are elements that have been long-awaited in a textbook, they do not come unpolitically encumbered.

The appeal to consumerism is pervasive with the usual chapters on buying food and drink in a café or restaurant, buying clothes at various types of stores and buying food at the market. Added to this is a chapter on spending money for leisure time activities and an unusual twist in dealing with La Rentrée (return to school) by focusing on buying school products, buying books and buying clothes. In all, 58 pages contain either pictures, advertisements or exercises dealing with

making purchases. Particularly noticeable are the 32 pages with photographs of actual currency. This goes way beyond familiarizing students with the money of francophone lands. The legitimizing of consumerism is the underlying force that guides the inclusion of such topics naively thought to be representational of our way of life and appealing to the American youth.

Beginning on both front and back textbook covers young Americans of means are called to come to France and perhaps other French- speaking locations as tourists, spend their money and have a good time. A road map of France is the backdrop on both covers which also show Paris city and metro maps. On the front we see fragmented images: two black students on the steps of an official (tricolore in evidence) French school; Canadian and French coins and the new French twenty franc St. Exupéry note (heavy on the Petit Prince, short on the existentialist writer); a picture of one of U. S. adult tourists' favorite night spots, the Place du Tertre with the Byzantine style Sacré Coeur, and a student backpack with U. S. passport, pen, headphones and a C.D. Continuing this theme on the back we see pictured three teens choosing postcards in a store, fashionable sunglasses atop Canadian currency, a picture of Québec's Chateau Frontenac hotel, and the same backpack filled with camera, address book and travel timetables to Paris, Abidjan, Québec and, barely visible, Fort-de-France. Be cool, learn French and travel the world! Even the Holt logo exclaims it with the globe graphically made to look like a suitcase and the words: "Foreign Language Destination Communication."

What's wrong with this picture? It is visually appealing, colorful, fun and will attract kids by offering the American dream. If you work hard in school you can earn the money to enjoy life and to travel to Europe and other places around

the world. In the first place that dream is now even popularly being declared a myth in an economically troubled America where classes are growing increasingly more disparate. Furthermore, it is particularly misconceiving for African American youth to identify with the dream myth in view of racial bias which continues to prohibit equitable achievement in school and in the market place. If African American students believe that the picture of black middle-class students in front of a French school is representative, that too is a deception. Today many French Africans, whose ancestors were victims of colonization, continue to live in poverty in Parisian and other metropolitan suburbs.

Within the textbook *la francophonie* is treated with more depth than ever before. Pictorially there are 767 photographs, only 156 of which are of blacks, 5 of North Africans, 23 of Asians, 4 of Polynesians and 4 of handicapped people. 619 drawings represent only 103 blacks/North Africans, 6 Asians 0 Polynesians and 5 handicapped people. Full-page maps of France, Africa, the Americas and the francophone world afford the students a legitimate reference of French speaking areas. Page one presents *le monde francophone* to students, differentiating between French as an official and an unofficial language. Successive chapters are introduced by 4 to 6 page cultural pictorials on different French speaking cities: Poitiers, Paris and Arles in France and Québec, Abidjan and Fort-de-France elsewhere in the world. This base is then integrated throughout the language lesson. While the multicultural approach is a much needed one, students are led into believing that life exists as a tourist sees it. Abidjan is devoid of poverty and disease, Québec is linguistically and culturally unthreatened and the Martiniquais escaped unscathed from colonialism and slavery. One step forward is not enough. Presenting chosen aspects of diversity without a serious examination of injustices in the social structure is misdirected multiculturalism

(Sleeter & Grant, 1994.) The glossy portrayal of interesting bits of touristic culture is naught but hegemony satisfying the demand for francophone representation without inviting the critical inquiry that total authenticity would provoke.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is clear that all of the textbooks examined reflect the views of the dominant powers. Some are more open to representing a pluralistic society but none totally legitimizes difference. Personal identification with diversity is lacking. Every book accepts the fact that some African and Asian countries use French as an official language, but not one book includes an Asian, African or Arab name in the list of French first names. Bienvenue indicates its isolationist views by providing no list of girls' and boys' first names. Students often draw from this list in creating a new identity in class. How is an African- or Asian-American to establish a personal connection if even this resource is lacking? Students who are comfortable within a discipline are likely to be motivated to continue in the field. Is it any wonder that there are very few minorities who major in French and go on to teach it?

Content and exercises promoting materialism and consumerism can be found in all books. This is an appealing draw to young Americans and can only help reproduce the same in the future. It is our responsibility as educators to make students aware of whose interests this emphasis serves.

Developing an awareness of omissions is equally important. In these texts we might ask why political structure and governments are left out. Why is there no mention of poverty, immigration, violence in French schools and northern Parisian suburbs, privatization, regionalism, unemployment, strikes, the *restos du coeur* (soup kitchens), racial bias against Jews and Muslims girls wearing the

veil? Why do texts which address multiculturalism ignore Québec separatism, French colonialism, Haitian dictatorship and immigration to the United States and Polynesian resistance to French nuclear testing? Why is the European Union totally ignored?

Until flexible, clustered materials can be developed to eliminate the linear structure of the teaching of foreign languages, teachers will be tied to the use of a textbook. With this in mind, we educators must accept the challenge to act as the catalyst for change in our scrutiny and use of the text and subsequent guiding of students to view the material they are presented in a critical manner. Teachers need to bring to the students' attention contradictions, omissions and stereotyping. Teachers and students must be learners and teachers together, using the foreign language constructively to eliminate bias. The incentive for learning French should not be tourist travel and imposed values on other peoples. The reward should be a border crossing to cultural communication, understanding and celebration of diversity. The metaphor of travel might well be appropriate if it were to represent the life-long journey we all take in the pursuit of knowledge, and reconstruction of society. Aware that there is no final destination, we travel this road together.

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